

Anything Goes - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (2nd March 2017)

Review by Cheryl Rogers

This is the third CAODS production of 'Anything Goes' I've seen over the years. The first time, twenty years ago, I was performing in it and last night brought back many memories. Actually, although filled to the brim with well-known songs, it was never a favourite of mine and now it really does seem dated. Having said that, it still has plenty to recommend it and CAODS looked as if they enjoyed performing it. This is a story of a journey from America to England set aboard an ocean liner, with all the twists and turns of several storylines being interwoven and played out together to the final conclusion when all the loose ends are tied up. Everything about it is over the top, with totally implausible characters and situations which have to be enjoyed in the right spirit - and CAODS captured that spirit.

First I really must mention the look of the piece. The ladies of the chorus were all costumed and wiggled elegantly, they looked sophisticated and wealthy and the lead performers were dressed totally in keeping with their characters, it was a pleasure to behold. So to the performance itself. The lead in this show is Reno Sweeney (played by Robyn Gowers), a nightclub singer of some repute. She is brash and funny and I think this is the best thing I have seen Robyn Gowers do. This part suited her personality and particular style of delivery of a comic line, she looked good and played it to the hilt. Billy Crocker, Reno's friend, was played with great charm and charisma by Thomas Harper. He performed all his many and difficult moves with confidence and ease. He took the character from slapstick to romance effortlessly. His love interest, the upper class debutante, Hope Harcourt, introduced us to a newcomer, Katie Doran. She was every inch the perfect casting with her dainty, elegant beauty and convincing cut glass accent. Not only did she look stunning but she danced well too, I'm sure we'll be seeing more of her. Another lovely character study was presented by Helen Hart as Hope's mother, Mrs Harcourt. Moonface Martin was the gangster in the plot and the part was capably taken by Kieran Bacon with Jill Gordon playing his sidekick, while the aristocratic twit, Sir Evelyn Oakleigh, was played with great enjoyment by Kevin Abrey. Reno was accompanied on the voyage by her backing singers known as the Angels. These four girls looked as if they were having great fun, the wide smiles never left their faces. They moved well, could all dance and worked together as a proper team, lovely.

There were many other characters but I don't have space to mention them all here as I really need to talk about the big musical numbers too. My favourite company number by far was the title song and closing of Act 1 'Anything Goes'. A fabulous spectacle in blue and white with the whole cast involved in a fast and energetic tap routine. This was the highlight for me and a round of applause to those who could obviously tap with gusto and to those who couldn't (but looked as though they could!) I also enjoyed Reno and Sir Evelyn performing a cheeky 'Let's Misbehave'. Practically every number in this show was a hit in its time, You're the top, It's De-lovely, I Get A kick out of You, Blow Gabriel Blow and more. If you're a Cole Porter fan then I hope you managed to get to this production.

Coming up next for CAODS is 'All Shook Up', a rock and roll musical comedy inspired by the songs of Elvis. It runs from 26th – 30th Sept so all you baby boomers out there get your tickets early, as this one will appeal to many people, I'm sure.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards